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October 3, 1961

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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Tuesday, October 3, 1961, 4:30 PM

Present: President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense  
General Taylor, General Norstad, General Lemnitzer,  
Admiral Anderson, General Smith - (Vice Chief of  
Staff of Air Forces), Lt. Gen. Munn - (Assistant  
Commandant, Marine Corps), Mr. Allen Dulles,  
Secretary Gilpatric, Mr. Kohler, Mr. Nitze,  
General Eddleman, Mr. Bundy

The President asked Secretary McNamara to summarize the  
results of his discussions with General Norstad. Secretary  
McNamara reported that agreement, and some disagreement,  
had been clarified in four categories.

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4. There was clear agreement to prepare a catalogue of plans for a response in various contingencies.

At this point the President asked for General Norstad's views. General Norstad began by stating that he was often astonished to find how little resemblance there was between his real views and those which he read about in newspapers or in memoranda. In general, he had always advocated a balanced NATO force. All NATO programs call for strong conventional forces. There was no misunderstanding of the need for such forces first. AIS

General Norstad believed that words often become rigid and misleading, and he felt this way about the words "graduation" and "escalation". He thought he himself had the responsibility for injecting "pause" and "threshold" into strategic discussions, and he wished he had not done so. "Graduation" and "escalation" suggest a serial progression in which we move easily and by prepared steps from one stage to another of a development within our own control. This seemed to him unrealistic; he believed that in normal war escalation is apt to be explosive.

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The President said that in his judgment statements were not the answer to this problem. We had indicated our position often enough. He had done so himself at the UN; the Attorney General had done so recently; and earlier statements by himself and others had repeatedly emphasized the will of the United States on this point. In his judgment, what was creating uncertainty was not statements or silence in the United States, but the facts of the developing balance of capabilities. It is the growing relative atomic strength of the Soviet Union, and the increasingly terrible character of any general war, which is affecting the expectations of our allies. The President asked for comment on what we could usefully say or do in addition to what we have done. The Secretary of State asked what the Europeans themselves thought of the prospect of nuclear war. General Norstad said that [REDACTED]

Mr. Nitze, in this later discussion pointed out that in fact it is conventional reinforcement which we do want from our allies at present, but the consensus appeared to be that we could work for specific improvements in the build-up without indicating a theoretical commitment to one kind of weapons, or one specific strategy as against another.

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The President then asked how we could get our allies into agreement on political and military planning. General Norstad reported de Gaulle's belief that there must be consultation on every decision. Couve de Murville had recently called him in to say that the French were "tough as hell" on the Berlin question, even while reporting their unwillingness to give advanced approval for procedures for use in the event of interruption of air access. The British have done well on air access but have reserved the right to respond to anti-aircraft fire, probably on Macmillan's own decision. Other countries have insisted on a rightful opportunity to share in the responsibility of planning. The President asked if we can't somehow get some definite agreement on planning. General Norstad responded that planning is going forward. The President noted the French refusal to make an advance commitment and General Norstad thought that when we knew our view we should give them a further chance to make such commitments.

The President remarked that as soon as somebody gets killed, the danger of major involvement is very great.

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The President then turned the discussion to the build-up of conventional forces. General Norstad said that in strictly military terms he ought to ask for six to eight divisions now but that he did not wish to ask for them. There followed discussion of specific modest adjustments of other forces, and it became plain that in the view of the Department of Defense an on-call limit of thirty days for six divisions was not feasible. General Norstad then indicated that what he meant to do was ask for the best available time.

The President remarked upon the importance of the gold drain and the need for obtaining German help on this point. General Norstad said it was a great question whether enlarged U. S. forces would lead Europeans to do more or relax. He thought the Germans need another "good, hard crack" taken at them soon, and he thought that we might, by hitting hard and early, get something substantial.

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General Taylor then asked General Norstad under what conditions he would want these six to eight divisions in the light of his statement that by the military book he should want them now. General Norstad thought the book answer was wrong in this case. He thought it was useless to stack up more forces on both sides in a situation in which the end result would leave us still outnumbered. He thought it not unreasonable to look at this situation as one of two snowballs in which an addition to the mass and acceleration on one side led to similar action on the other. He doubted whether this movement would psychologically be a good thing for our allies. He believed that we were in a poker game and he pointed out that when this card has been played, we will

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not have it left to play later. When General Taylor asked under what circumstances he would play the card, General Norstad replied that he would do it only when the situation seemed bound to deteriorate. He remarked that there was no great desire in Europe for these forces, and although he did not say so directly, he may have believed that an early deployment would appear to indicate a shift away from reliance on nuclear weapons if needed. The President repeated the American position: we will not accept anything that we regard as a defeat, and we are just as determined as de Gaulle.

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McGeorge Bundy

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